

DR. MACLAREN ON THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND CHURCH UNIONS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

A lovely October afternoon; an intelligent, appreciative audience; a practical, timely topic, and a man to handle it who has a fine turn for going to the roots of things, were the principal factors in making the opening exercises in Knox College more than usually pleasant and instructive. Dr. McLaren seemed at his best, and nobody who reads this column needs to be told that his best is good enough for any place or any occasion. In the best possible spirit, and with an occasional gleam of quiet, pawky humour, that would make the features of any grim Genevan relax, he marched over the whole field, routed one opponent after another, took every position worth taking, and at the end of the hour there was little left of organic union but its funeral.

"My son," said a farmer's wife to her boy when he came home with the marks of a severe mauling, "you look as though some one had put you through a threshing machine." That was exactly how organic union looked when Dr. McLaren had done with it.

The main point the Professor made, the very Gibraltar of his position, is that the Church of Christ is one now. Union is a reality, an existing fact to be recognized and acted upon, not something to be sought after:

The bearing of the Protestant idea of the Church on Union includes in its widest range the whole sacramental host of God's elect; all who have been, all who are, and all who shall be gathered into one under Christ, the Head thereof. It is the mystical body of Christ. Its members, in whatsoever nationality or ecclesiastical organization they may be found, are so united that they necessarily constitute one body in all ages. Christ dwells in each of them by His Holy Spirit, and each of them, as a result of the Spirit's grace, abides in Christ by faith. This union is indissoluble and eternal. For the members of Christ's mystical body "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter i. 5). He who founded the Church on a rock has declared in reference to all his believing people, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John x. 28). The members of Christ's mystical body are not only made one with Christ by the bonds of this blessed union, but they are made one with each other in Him. They are the habitation of the same Spirit and partakers of the same faith, and are animated by a common life. In its most fundamental aspect this union is not a thing to be sought after or aspired to. It is a present reality, an existing fact, which should be recognized and acted upon, but not sought after.

Believers are one with Christ, and their union with Christ makes them one with each other. They are one now and here because they are one with Christ. Compare this glorious conception of Christian unity with the vulgar idea of herding mankind into one great organic union, the principal feature of which seems to be the size of the crowd, and you see at once the difference between the scriptural and the popular conception of Church Union. The scriptural idea is spiritual; the common, popular idea is pretty much the same thing as a union between the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railways would be.

Twenty odd years ago Prof. Young told his class one day that he did not believe in the literal restoration of the Jews to Palestine. One of the students seemed to be of a contrary opinion and the following brief dialogue took place:—

What do you make of those passages which teach that the Jews will return?

There are none.

Why do ministers pray for the restoration of the Jews?

I never do. They are better where they are.

We may imagine a somewhat similar dialogue taking place between a bumptious student and Prof. McLaren. The student would say:—

What do you make of those passages which teach visible, palpable, organic union of all believers?

There are none.

What do you say to that passage which speaks of one fold and one shepherd?

It is wrongly translated. Christ said "one flock, one shepherd." Look at the Revised Version. A flock and a fold are entirely different things.

Why do ministers pray for union of believers?

I never do. Believers are one now.

One of the most effective parts of the lecture was the paragraph in which the professor deals with the closing words of John xvii. 21. "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." These words are often quoted to prove that a visible, palpable, union of the denominations would greatly impress the world and prove to mankind the divinity of our Lord's mission:—

It is claimed however, that the end for which this oneness of believers is sought, viz., "That the world might believe that thou hast sent me," implies a unity which is visible and palpable, as a great visible organization is the only thing the world can see and be impressed by. But such a unity does not necessarily lead the world to believe.

When the character and spirit of the organization happen to be bad, it may have the very opposite effect. It is only when the members of the visible Church illustrate in their lives the spirit of Christ that the world is impressed; and we venture to think that the impression will not depend so much on their being grouped in one or in many visible organizations as upon the beauty of the lives which they lead. History pours contempt upon the dream that the world is to be converted through the impression made by the unity of a great compact, visible society of all sorts of men. Something very different from the unity of a vast ecclesiastical corporation is needed to convince the world of the divinity of Christ's mission.

If a vast ecclesiastical corporation can convince the world to seek and to save sinners the people of Quebec ought to be pretty well convinced by this time. They have a vast corporation down there, but we have to raise funds to buy them Bibles. If the vast corporation theory had anything in it, Rome should have Christianized the world centuries ago. As the professor well remarks, the character of Christians is what impresses the world, not the size of the Church to which they

belong. One man who lives a Christly life does more to commend the Gospel to the world than a million formalists however close the ecclesiastical corporation to which they belong. One life of heroic self-denial has more spiritual power than all the union conferences ever held. One act of self-sacrifice for Christ impresses men more than a thousand "union meetin's." A million vain, pompous, self-seeking clerics, flaunting academic honours, fighting for preferment, and wrangling for office, do not impress the world for Christ as much as William Chalmers, Burns or George Leslie McKay. Robert Murray McChesney's tombstone has more power to impress men for Christ than some Presbyteries have. What the world is waiting for—what Canada is waiting for just now—is men and women who show by lives a little like the life of Christ that there is reality in the mission and work of Christ. A thousand millions of men bound as tightly in one church as the members of a masonic lodge, would have no power to impress the world for Christ if they gave a cent to Christ on Sunday and gave a hundred to selfishness during the week.

There are many other points in the lecture well worth discussion but they will keep until next week.

THE Gnostic HERESY.—ITS RISE, PROGRESS AND EFFECTS.

FROM THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE LATE MR. T. HENNING.

Having now presented a short view of Gnosticism and of the three great sources from which it probably originated we proceed to exhibit some of its effects upon early Christianity.

EFFECTS OF GNOSTICISM ON CHRISTIANITY.

The singular skill and dexterity (if we may be permitted to speak so of a work which was divine) with which Christianity wound its way through the conflicting elements of Gnosticism and Judaism, combining what was pure and lofty in each, "simplifying, harmonizing and modifying," each to its own peculiar system, increases our admiration of its "unrivalled wisdom, its deep insight into the universal nature of man, and its pre-acquaintance, as it were, with the countless diversities of human character, prevailing at the time of its propagation." But unless, as has been remarked, the same profound wisdom had watched over its inviolable preservation, which presided over its origin, a reaction of the several systems over which it prevailed was inevitable. We have before shown that Orientalism had already spread to the northward of Alexandria, which had long been the fatal and prolific soil of speculative error, and that the form in which Christianity first encountered this widespread Orientalism was Gnosticism.

That Gnosticism existed as early as the times of the apostles is evident from the many allusions to their doctrines, made both by Paul and John. The former, writing to Timothy, cautions him to "withdraw himself" from the perverse disputings of men of corrupt mind, and exhorts him to "avoid profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science, *gnoseos*, falsely so called," and the latter, in a passage to which we shall again refer, distinctly points out the prevalence of this system: "Ye have heard," says he, Chap. ii. 18, "that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists."

The first Orientalist, or at least the first who attempted to unite Gnosticism with Christianity, was Simon Magus, who assumed the Oriental title of the "Power of God." Little authentic, beyond what is related in the Acts of the Apostles, is known regarding him. He appears to have been a person of considerable importance, since he is called by Beausobre the "hero of the Romance of Heresy." He was, perhaps, one of that class of adventurers which abounded at this period, with whom the opponents of Christianity attempted to confound Jesus and His apostles. His doctrine was Oriental in its language and in its pretensions, and is singularly characteristic of the state of the public mind at this period of the world. Simon, it has been supposed, was at no time a Christian. Neither was the heir and successor of his doctrines, Menander; and it was not till it has made some progress in the Syrian and Asiatic cities that Christianity came into closer contact with those Gnostic or pre-gnostic systems, which, instead of opposing it with direct hostility, received it with more insidious veneration, and warped it into an unnatural accordance with its own principles. As soon as Christianity appeared and continued to be developed, many of these Oriental speculatists hailed it as the completion of their own wild theories; and forced it into accordance with their universal tenet of distinct intelligences emanating from the primal Being.

Dr. Burton attributes the early prevalence of Gnostic errors to the length of time (fifteen years) which elapsed, so he thinks, between the conversion of St. Paul and his first journeying and preaching in Cilicia, Phrygia, Macedonia, Athens and Corinth. During the times that the apostles have been supposed to have confined themselves to Judea, the Gospel was making rapid progress in several parts of the world.

When we consider, says he, that this progress was without co-operation and control of the apostles, and when we come to consider the state of philosophy at that time, we shall not be surprised to find the doctrines of the Gospel disguised and altered, and the introduction into the religion of so many Christian converts of numerous and destructive errors. During the greater part of this period Simon Magus and his followers were spreading their pernicious tenets; and

there is reason to believe that in many countries, before they were visited by an apostle, the name of Christ, introduced in a corruption of the Platonic doctrines, soon acquired sanctity and veneration, and thus he became a kind of "metaphysical impersonation," while the religion lost its purely moral cast and assumed the character of a "speculative Theogony."

Ephesus is the scene of the first collision between Christianity and Orientalism, of which we can trace any authentic record. It was the great emporium of magic arts, and the place where the "unwieldy allegory" of the East lingered in the bosom of the more "elegant Grecian Humanism." Here the Greek, the Orientalist, the Jew, the philosopher, the magician, the follower of John the Baptist, and the teacher of Christianity were no doubt encouraged to settle by the peaceful opulence of the inhabitants and the constant influx of strangers under the "proudly indifferent protection of the municipal authorities and the Roman Government." In Ephesus, according to universal tradition, survived the last of the apostles, and here the last of the gospels appeared in the midst of this struggle with the foreign elements of conflicting systems. According to the views of some, John wrote, not against any peculiar sect or individual, but to arrest the spirit of Orientalism, which was working into the essence of Christianity, destroying its beautiful simplicity, and threatening altogether to change both its design and its effects upon mankind.

While he appropriated the well-known and almost universal term, the Logos, to the Divine Author of Christianity, yet he altogether rejected all the wild cosmogonical speculations on the formation of the world. The union of the soul with the Deity is not, in his writings, the pantheistic absorption into the parent Deity, "it is a union by the aspirations of the pious heart with the Father. He insists not on abstraction from matter, but from sin, from hatred, from all fierce and corrupting passions. The new life of the soul is active as well as meditative; it is no principle of isolation in solitary and rapturous meditation; it is a moral, not an imaginative purity."

Irenæus contends that one special reason for his writing his gospel was to refute the heresy of the Gnostics generally. Though Lampe and Lardner have discovered some inconsistencies in his statements, and have in consequence opposed his supposition, yet we agree with Mosheim and Michaelis, who have confuted their objections, and shown that even if Irenæus had not asserted that John wrote his Gospel with this intent, still the contents of the Gospel itself would lead to this conclusion. In the very choice of his expressions, such as light, life, etc., he had in view the philosophy of the Gnostics, who constantly used or rather abused these terms. The positions contained in the first fourteen verses are antitheses to positions maintained by the Gnostics who used the words *logos*, *zoe*, *phos*, *monogenes*, *pleroma* etc., as technical terms of their philosophy.

Besides the speeches of Christ which St. John has selected are such as confirm the positions laid down in the first chapter of the Gospel. "Therefore," says Michaelis, "we must conclude that his principal object throughout the whole of his Gospel was to confute the errors of the Gnostics."

In order that we may the more clearly see what these errors were, and to judge better of the effects which such tenets were likely to produce, it may not be irrelevant summarily to state the doctrines laid down by John in his first chapter as contra-positions to those of the Gnostics. The evangelist asserts:

1. That Christ is the Logos, or Word of God.
2. That the Logos and Monogenes are not distinct beings, but one and the same person (v. 14).
3. That the Logos is not an inferior Aeon, but God (v. 1).
4. That he perfectly knew the supreme God, being always with Him in the *pleroma* (v. 18).
5. That He is not to be distinguished from the Demiurgus; for he is the creator of the whole world (vs. 3, 10).
6. That life and light are not particular and separate spirits, but the same with Logos and Christ (vs. 4, 7-9, 11). And therefore, that Christ, the Logos, Life, Light, the Only Begotten are not distinct Aeons, but one and the same divine person.
7. That no particular Aeon entered into John the Baptist by the name of Light, to communicate to him a superior knowledge of the divine will (v. 8), but that he was a mere man, and, though inspired, much inferior to Jesus, being only the forerunner of Him (vs. 6, 8, 15).
8. That the supreme God was not entirely unknown before the time of Christ (vs. 9, 10).
9. That the Jews were not the peculiar people of an inferior God, such as the Demiurgus; but of Christ Himself, the only begotten Son of God (v. 11).
10. That in the fulness of time the Son of God took upon Him human nature and became man (v. 14).
11. That He abolished the law of Moses, which was only a shadow of good things (v. 17).
12. That the Jew has no more right in this divine Person than the Gentile; for whoever believes in Him becomes thereby a child of God, and is entitled by that adoption to a glorious inheritance (vs. 12, 13).

From this summary we think it is evident that the first fourteen verses of this chapter are purely doctrinal, not historical, and that they were introduced with a polemical view to refute errors prevailing at that time respecting the person of Jesus Christ. That these errorists were the Gnostics St. John himself has really declared throughout in express terms.